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ABSTRACT

An overview of the language experience approach and suggestions for implementing it at all levels of instruction are presented in this booklet. Based on the assumption that it is impossible to isolate reading instruction from other language functions, a multimethod approach is described which focuses on the linguistic, conceptual, and perceptual experiences of children. The following topics are discussed: history and rationale of the language experience approach, beginning reading instruction, the classroom as a learning laboratory, organization for learning, the language experience approach in upper elementary, middle, and high schools, adult literacy programs, and bilingual programs. (LL)

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THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH TO TEACHING READING

CS001809

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
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The Instructional Services Section greatly acknowledges

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in the development of this publication.

FOREWORD

Today's children face a world far more complex than faced by children of the past. Their need for fully developed communication skills is constantly growing. An approach, gaining popularity among reading teachers, is Language Experience.

To provide guidance and assistance to those teachers interested in the Language Experience Approach to teaching reading, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction presents this handbook to the teachers of Illinois.

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IN GRATITUDE

The opportunity to publish the following material was made possible by the Illinois Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and I express my gratitude for their support and concern for the improvement of reading instruction. Judy Overturf, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction Consultant, is certainly deserving of special thanks for her contributions and assistance, and for "overseeing" the whole project to make it a reality. Bill Burlingham is responsible for the sensitive photographs of children that appear in the publication. The pupils, teachers, instructional consultants, and administrators of the Rockford Public Schools are to be thanked for their cooperation and assistance; Miss Blanche Martin, Director of Elementary Education, Mr. Paul Wixom, Principal of Martin Luther King Elementary School, and his entire teaching staff must receive commendations for their support and enthusiasm concerning the language-experience multimethod approach to reading. The teachers of the "sixes" at Gurler Alternative School, DeKalb Public Schools, are to be commended for their contributions.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Russell G. Stauffer, University of Delaware, for his teachings, research, and writing in the area of the Language Experience Approach to the teaching of reading. Dr. Stauffer has contributed the major concept of the Language Experience Approach as embracing multimethod approaches to the teaching of reading: language-experiences utilizing the "Directed Reading – Thinking Activity" as a procedure used to help children improve and develop critical reading-thinking skills, and independent reading utilizing the development and fostering of "self-regulating" behavior.

Finally, our Reading Clinic team at Northern Illinois University deserves recognition, as always, for their consideration, support and enthusiasm.

Jane L. Davidson
Director, The Reading Clinic
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois

In August of 1973, State Departments of Education throughout the United States were requested to submit innovative reading programs to the Florida State Department of Education. The Martin Luther King Project developed in cooperation with the Reading Center at Northern Illinois University was one of twelve programs selected to present at the "Johnny Shall Read" conference held December 20 - 21, 1973, in Tallahassee, Florida. This Conference was designed to make Florida administrators aware of innovative reading programs throughout the nation.

"My hypothesis is that children and adults will become constant readers, develop personal interests and habits of reading only if they have a fairly high level of skill and only if reading meets some of their deepest needs."

– David H. Russell, *Reading for Effective Personal Living*

Bill

CHAPTER I
HISTORY AND RATIONALE

The history of the Language Experience Approach to reading can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. Although the title had not been established at the time, Leo Tolstoy used the compositions of his Russian students as reading materials.

The initial use of such techniques in the United States was in the early 20th century when experience charts became common. These charts, usually found in the primary grades, provided beginning readers with reading materials developed from classroom activities. The use of these charts laid a foundation for what has become known today as the Language-Experience Approach.

In recent years, the approach has flourished through the work of well-known professionals such as Roach Van Allen, Russell G. Stauffer, Dorsey Hammond, and others. It has progressed far beyond simply a program for young readers to its present use with illiterate adults and all ages between.

The approach uses the premise that children react positively to those things which are relevant. Therefore, the experiences which one has are the most meaningful to that individual. Teachers have long known that a child's oral vocabulary exceeds his written or reading vocabulary. Teachers have also discovered that it is virtually impossible to isolate reading instruction from the other language functions. Thus, Language Experience capitalizes on all the above elements by using the child's vocabulary, experiences, and innate

desire to express himself through incorporating speaking, listening, reading, spelling, and writing.

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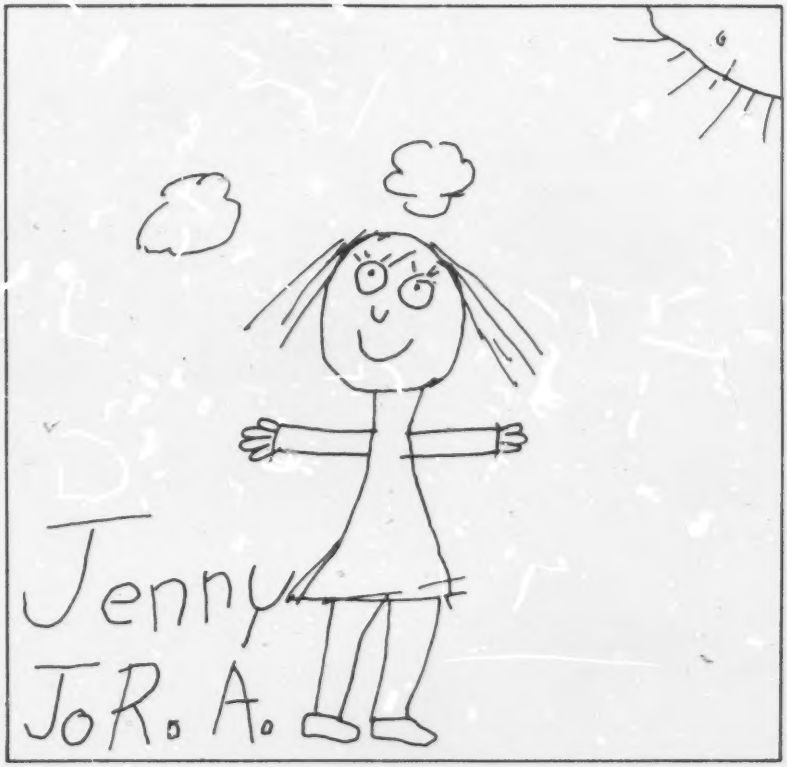

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CHAPTER II
BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION

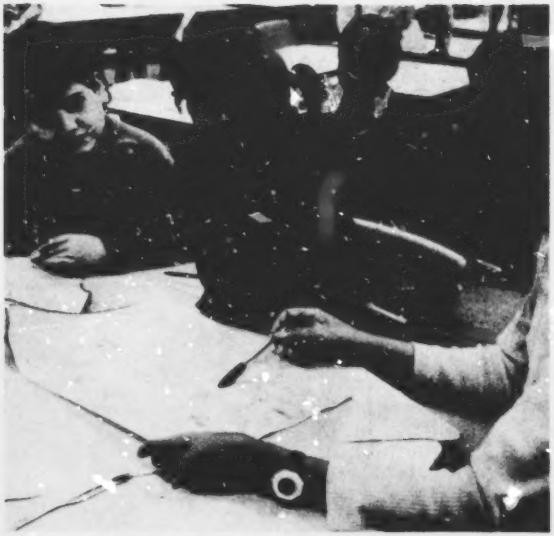
Beginning reading instruction with the Language Experience Approach focuses on the child and the wealth of linguistic, conceptual, and perceptual experiences he possesses. Our beginning readers are language users and come to us with a firm grasp of language. Some children have language patterns which are significantly different from other children's language patterns. Reading instruction based on a strong Language-Experience Approach allows a child to have a "match" between his spoken language patterns and written language materials, since his reading materials reflect his own experiences and language.

A child is introduced to reading instruction through the use of "experience" stories by dictating first in small groups and next on an individual basis. The teacher must provide children with many natural opportunities to *discover* the relationship between spoken and written language and *discover* the significant differences of written language. The emphasis throughout instruction is on reading as a thinking process.

GROUP DICTATED EXPERIENCE STORIES

There are alternatives in planning an experience for children involving group dictation. One teacher, Mrs. L., gathered a small group of children about her and asked them to discuss the ways they would draw faces. The discussion involved facts, such

as everyone's face has two eyes, a nose, a mouth, hair and ears. They then talked about the moods created by faces, and that the expressions on faces sometimes gave clues regarding peoples' feelings. For example, a mouth that turns down at the corners gives an indication that a person might be sad, etc. The language flowed on regarding attributes involved in the concept "face." The teacher then turned to her chart board and directed children to summarize their discussion by first asking how one would draw a face. Children began to volunteer responses and as each child contributed, the teacher recorded the statement on the chart board. She then asked if they could identify characteristics of faces



which give clues as to peoples' feelings. Again, she recorded their responses, reproducing each child's statement exactly as it was spoken. The following story was the result.

FACES

We put the eyes on the faces.
We put the nose by the eyes.
We put the mouth right behind the nose.
My face was happy.
My face mad.
My face is sad.
My face lightened me.

Martin Luther King Elem. School
Rockford, IL

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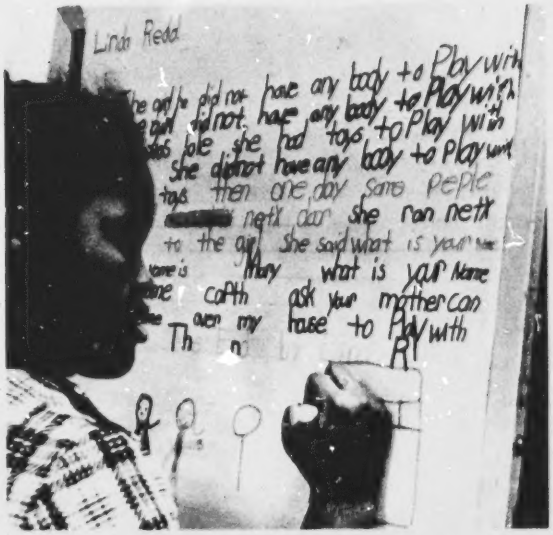
She then read the story to the class, and as she read, she used a pointer to point out the words. She asked the children if they could think of an appropriate title for their story. They decided to call it "Faces." Then she gave the children drawing paper and asked them to draw a face. She wrote the title "Faces" at the top of each of the drawings while the students worked. Some children copied the writing.

This experience provided children with an opportunity to see the relationship between spoken language patterns and written language patterns, i.e., the teacher demonstrated that she could write down what each child dictated and she could read it back. By using a marker under the words as she read, she demonstrated the left-to-right directionality involved in reading. The pupils saw that some letters were different from others. Upper- and lower-case letters were also used. Some of the children could identify some of the other words in the story. Each child could read his name on his drawing and each child could read the title "Faces" which appeared on each story. The children who were involved in this group-dictation experience could achieve immediate success in reading, because they could read their names as well as the story title. Each child also had opportunities to listen to others speak and each one had an opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge in identifying attributes of the concept "face" by drawing a picture which showed attributes. It is interesting to note that some children included eyebrows and other details in their drawings. Sharing was an important aspect, in that pupils shared their drawings with others.

The next day, the children gathered again in their group and the teacher reread the chart story to them. They all reread it with her as she pointed out the words. Next she invited a child to read the story to her. She pointed out the title and the child read it. He could find the word in other places in the story and he could also read his name. Other children were invited to read. A few children could read additional words in the story. One child could read back the entire sentence she had dictated.

The teacher then invited the children to become involved with activities in other areas of the classroom which was organized into interest centers. One of the most important areas focused on library books which were a part of the classroom library. Many of the books contained the words "Faces," "Eyes," "Nose," "Mouth," etc. Children were encouraged to share their findings with others. These children were provided with the opportunity to locate and read words in isolation which had been used in their group-dictated story. A stack of old magazines provided another source from which children could find familiar words. These words were cut out of the magazines and pasted on sheets of construction paper. Although the type size and style of the printing used in the magazines differs from the type size and style of the print used in most basals, children don't seem to encounter any problems in reading it, and some children do not even notice that there is a difference. A child's excitement at finding his word is what matters.



The range of individual differences was noted by the teacher. She identified the children who sustained their interest in reading by becoming involved in reading type activities, the children who were utilizing auditory and visual discrimination, and those who could locate words in isolation as well as words in context. All the children in the group were exposed to reading as a meaning-getting process; all were exposed to the use of context as a strong aid to word recognition.

The teacher provided alternatives from which the pupils could select choices for additional activities. Thus, each child had opportunities to make an individual commitment under the guidance of his teacher

regarding his activities. The teacher involved them later in an evaluation session, where each child had a chance to talk about his accomplishments that morning. This kind of sharing is important because each child has an opportunity to talk about his accomplishments which is rewarding in itself. he expands his own experiences by listening to what others have done, and he goes home with successful experiences to relate to his family.

The third day the group met with their teacher, each child was given a copy of his group-dictated story. Each child underlined the words he *knew* (which is a more positive approach than the practice of underlining unknown words) as he read the story to his teacher. Each child's name was written at the end of the story. Some children were able to write their own names. While the teacher was moving about the room listening to individuals read, some children read to each other, others were involved in drawing illustrations to go with the story, and some children were involved in reading the classroom library books or doing other activities which the teacher had provided as alternatives.

What a marvelous opportunity for the teacher to diagnostically observe the children's performance! She noted the following as she worked with her children and moved about the room:

1. The children who could write their own names.
2. The number of words each child underlined.

3. The children who could locate words in isolation as well as in context.
4. The children who knew how to use context clues to help them recognize words.
5. The children who could already read.
6. The children who used language fluently.
7. The children who followed the print from one line to the next on a left-to-right basis.
8. The children who showed curiosity in reading by moving on to other reading-related activities.
9. The children who showed maturity through their illustrations.

PUPIL-DICTATED STORIES

Within two or three weeks after the children had experiences with group-dictated stories, Mrs. L. planned her schedule to begin individual dictation. Each child was invited to dictate with the teacher. This time the classroom pet hamster, Amos, provided the stimulus for each child's talk. Through skillful questioning by the teacher, each child was encouraged to dictate statements about the hamster. The teacher sat at a table and each pupil stood beside her in a position where he could easily view the teacher recording his language. As each child completed his dictation, the teacher read back what had been recorded using a pointer under the words to indicate the left-to-right direction. Next the teacher invited the pupil to read the story with her. Some children recognized many of the words and felt secure about reading. In these instances, the teacher let her voice drop to a bare whisper. In other instances in which the child knew fewer words, the teacher let her voice project a little more strongly and, thus, provided support for the child reading. No child was permitted to struggle with individual words. In individual dictation as well as group dictation, the emphasis was on reading for meaning. However, the teacher again noted the individual pupil's srengths and weaknesses. After the pupil had finished reading his story with the teacher, he was given a sheet of drawing paper to draw an illustration. Later, his dictated story was attached to the drawing. The date was written on each story for later reference.

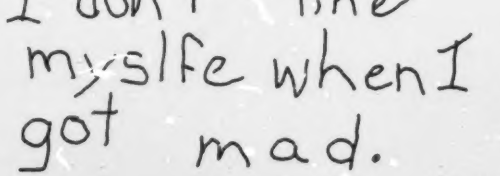
Children were invited to share their stories and illustrations with others. The pride and spirit of authorship was experienced through the sharing process. The illustration served as an additional reinforcement to the meaning of the story. Some children were able to read the statements which they had dictated. Others who experienced difficulties with some of the words used the picture clues to "tell" parts of their stories. Other words in the story provided strong context clues as an aid to word recognition. If the story contained ideas in sequential order, the sequence also provided an aid to word recognition.

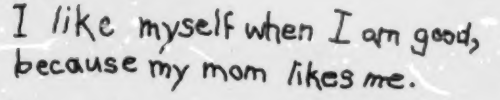
Books about hamsters were placed on the classroom library table to catch the children's attention and provide them with the opportunity of transferring and applying their skills from the stories which they dictated to the printed material found in the library books which contained many of the same words. Some of the children sat together in pairs and read their stories to each other, which was a natural way to develop listening skills.

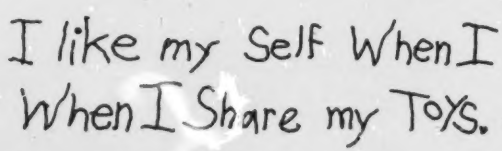
Many types of stimuli are used in classrooms to provide children with materials for dictation. Teachers may use social studies activities, science experiments, field trips, playground walks, music, painting, etc., as a means of giving children concepts and ideas for dictation. Some teachers have been successful in using structured language patterns as models such as "The House That Jack Built" and "The Old Lady Who Swallowed the Fly." The following samples are products of the phrases "I like myself when . . ." and "I don't like

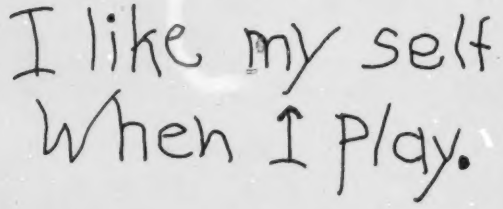
myself when . . ." dictated to the teacher or written by six-year-olds who have become involved in language experiences:

I don't like myself when I am mad. When I get sent up to my room. (dictated)









It's possible for most teachers to organize their days so that they plan time to have each child dictate twice a week. One should remember that beginning readers usually don't dictate lengthy stories – many of the children begin by dictating one or two sentences. If a child does express interest in writing the "Great American Novel" at the age of six, then the teacher might encourage him to dictate short sections at a time, as well as encouraging him to practice his skills in writing so that he can eventually become more independent by doing his own writing.

Whenever a child dictates to his teacher, the teacher reads it back to him to see if he feels everything is in order. It pays to read the story back to a child – now and then a child changes his mind about what he wants to say and the teacher is providing him with an opportunity to make changes. He has an opportunity to hear how his own language sounds. The emphasis is on meaning and most all children will note when their dictation lacks meaning. "It doesn't make sense," commented one young man critically. The teacher asked him what he wanted to change in order to make his story make sense. He quickly analyzed his sequence as being faulty, changed the order of events, and then showed visible satisfaction when he listened again and became aware that his story had meaning.

There are several things a child can do with a story after it is dictated:

1. He can reread it, either to himself or with someone else.

2. He can draw an illustration to attach to it.
3. He can underline the words he knows.
4. He can copy some of the words or sentences.

One six year old, involved in science experiments, dictated the following experiment (which was called the "I Don't Know" experiment) to his teacher:

I DON'T KNOW

First I put baking soda in a glass tube. Put in paint. Then put in vinegar and then the cork. What happened? It foamed up and pressure builds up so the cork pops.

– Todd L.

The Witch

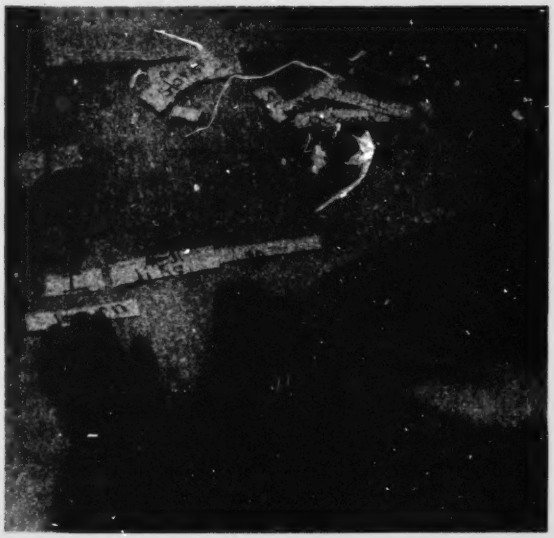
The witch is drinking her potion. She died. She was driving her car and she fell out of her car. She got bruised.

– Erica

The story above was dictated by the pupil to her teacher. The pupil took the story back to her table and reread it. The second day, she underlined all the words she knew. Two days later, she drew another line under all the words she recognized. The first and second days, she could read the the entire story and underlined every word. The third day she recognized seventeen of the twenty-three words in the story. The words which are double-underlined are words which may then be placed in her own word bank.

WORD BANK

A word bank (Stauffer, 1970) contains a collection of words which a pupil has recognized at sight two days in a row. These words are usually from a child's oral language which has been recorded on an experience chart or dictated to the teacher.



When a child begins his collection of word cards, he needs something in which to store them. Many teachers paint small boxes, recycled Clorox bottles or similar items which will be used as word banks. Each child's name is printed on his word bank.

Word bank cards are usually cut from index cards and are approximately one-half inch to three-fourths of an inch high and are cut in lengths to fit the length of the word.

Three word cards from a child's word bank are shown below.

monster	haunted	house

Each child needs to have his name appear on one of his first word cards.

One child knew the following words two days in a row from a story he had dictated to his teacher. When he realized he could put them together and form the same sentence he had dictated to his teacher, he also asked for a card which had a period printed on it. He was beginning to discover punctuation marks.

I	like	rabbits	.

As stated earlier, each child's story has the date and is numbered. The number of the story is also placed on the back of the word card for reference. For example, one child knew four words from his first story which was dictated on September 25, and on his ninth story, dictated one month later, he had fifteen cards placed in his word bank! He was proud of his achievement and so were his parents when he told them.

Word bank cards can be used many ways. Children may choose to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. The following activities are things a child may do with his word cards:

1. Share his cards by reading them to another child.
2. Categorize and classify his word cards. (The possibilities are limitless as the number of cards in the word bank increases.)
3. Arrange word cards so that they form sentences. (Children working together with their word banks are able to form a larger variety of sentences.)

Two children working together made the following arrangements with their word cards and asked the teacher to come and see their categories.

rabbits	happy	blue	bug
dog	sad	green	broke
hamster	cry	yellow	bottle
turtle		pink	
		red	
		white	

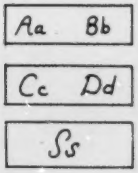
The teacher asked them to explain their categories. They replied that the first category contained "pet" words, the second category

contained "feeling" words, the third category contained "color" words, and the last category contained words beginning with the letter "b" of the alphabet and started with the same sound. These two children will soon be able to classify lists of word cards. Note that the children were also applying their knowledge of letter-sound associations.

Word bank cards can be used very effectively for inductive teaching of phonics principles. A teacher may wish to work with three or four children in a small group for an inductive lesson in which they categorize their word cards and begin to discover and form their own generalizations regarding the phonics principles.

A child needs daily opportunities to work with his word bank cards. He frequently asks his teacher for additional word cards. These cards should be kept apart from other word cards until the teacher checks to make sure that the "new" words have become known words.

Children tend to feel possessive about their word banks and enjoy having new words to "deposit" in their banks. When a child has so many word cards that he has difficulty finding the words he needs in forming sentences, the teacher might provide him with small envelopes in which he can place his cards. Each envelope will have an upper-case and lower-case letter on it. This is a natural way to have children become aware of alphabetizing.



Two of the envelopes at the left are used by a child to store word cards beginning with more than one letter of the alphabet. The child had so many words which began with the letter "s" that he felt the word cards should be in an envelope by themselves.

Should a child forget one of his words, he simply looks on the back of the card to find the number of the story from which it was taken, finds the story, and then locates the word in context. The story context usually provides the pupil with enough clues to recognize the word. If he still isn't able to recognize the word, then he should ask his teacher for help. In the meantime, the troublesome card must be removed from the bank until it becomes a known word again.

USE OF BASAL READING SERIES

When a child has approximately 150 words in his word bank, he is ready for instruction in the first hardback book of a basal reading series. This reading of experience stories, reinforced by daily work with his word bank, has provided him with a background sufficient

to permit him to bypass preprimers and their artificial language patterns. Preprimers may be kept in the room for independent reading by the children, who will undoubtedly note that, in the preprimers, "people don't talk like that."

Any basal series which is content oriented and emphasizes reading for meaning instead of "decoding" will prove to be compatible with the other elements in a language-experience multi-method approach to teaching reading.

THE DIRECTED READING – THINKING ACTIVITY (DR–TA)

The DR–TA is a procedure devised by Dr. Russell G. Stauffer (1969) which can be used to present materials from basal readers. The DR–TA procedure is basically a questioning strategy which provides a means for students to make responses which are chiefly critical and which represent higher levels of thinking which go beyond literal levels.

Since the language-experience multi-method approach as described in this manual, places emphasis on reading for meaning and reading as a thinking process, it appears particularly appropriate to suggest the use of the DR–TA procedure as an effective teaching strategy to assist in improving and developing skills of critical reading and thinking.

The five steps in the DR–TA are as follows:

I. IDENTIFYING PURPOSES FOR READING – Individual or group purposes set by students based on some limited clues in material and their own background of experience.

II. ADJUSTMENT OF RATE TO PURPOSES AND MATERIAL – Rate adjustment depends upon the purposes and nature and difficulty of the reading material; surveying, skimming, and studying are involved.

III. OBSERVING THE READING – Teacher assists students requesting help, notes abilities to adjust rate to purpose and material, use word recognition steps, and comprehend material.

IV. DEVELOPING COMPREHENSION – Students check purposes by accepting, rejecting or redefining purposes.

V. FUNDAMENTAL SKILL-TRAINING ACTIVITIES: DISCUSSION, FURTHER READING, ADDITIONAL STUDY, WRITING – Students and teacher are identifying these needs throughout the strategy.

The first step is one in which the student examines available clues and declares purposes depending upon his background of experience, the experiences of the group, and the content of the material to be read. A group composed of five to eight children is most effective for allowing interaction among the children.

The teacher begins by asking the children to predict the outcome of a story by reading

only the title or looking at a beginning illustration. Example: Teacher has pupils read the title of a story and asks, "What do you think this story will be about?" She then allows students to make responses freely (pupils don't raise hands to be called upon to respond). The pupils are allowed to talk freely to one another about all the possibilities that might exist. The teacher regulates the amount of material the pupils read at one time, and after they have made their initial predictions, she then asks them to read the first few paragraphs of the story (or the first page). The pupils read to gain additional clues in order to refine their initial predictions. The teacher will also ask the pupils to prove or substantiate these predictions. For example: (Pupils have read the first page of the story) The teacher might ask, "Now that you have some additional clues, what do you think will happen in this story?" As pupils begin to respond with refined predictions, the teacher might ask the following questions: "Why do you think so?" "How can you prove your prediction?"

After children have had ample opportunity to respond with predictions which have been supported by some proof, they are directed to read on to the next place in the story that the teacher deems appropriate to serve as a stopping point. Predictions continue to be refined until the solution or outcome of the story has been read.

The emphasis is not on oral reading of the story. Children will naturally read segments of the story out loud to prove or support their predictions. This is an important use of oral reading. Pupils are encouraged to read silently. They will become more fluent in adjusting their rate if each child is permitted to adjust his own rate to fit the complexity of the material and his own purpose for reading. Children will have many opportunities to practice and develop an appreciation for oral reading, reading stories to share with others and recording their voices on tape. Members of a reading group, meeting for the primary purpose of developing and improving their reading-thinking skills, should not be forced to follow the rate of one child as he reads a portion of the story, but should have the opportunity to become flexible in rate adjustment.

The following transcript (Davidson, 1970) is an excerpt taken from a taped lesson in which the teacher used a DR–TA procedure with a group of five children reading on an instructional level of fourth grade:

Code for Q's and Level of Response	Pupil or Teacher	Excerpt from Lesson: "Bad-Luck Bozo"
Q. Gathering Spec. Facts	T	What's the title of your story?
Literal	P1	Bad-Luck Bozo
Q. Interpreting	T	What do you think is going to happen next?
Theorizing	P1	He wants to go see some hockey games and stuff like that and his father and mother just won't go.

Q. Evaluating	T	Why do you think this is going to happen?
Literal	P1	I don't know—I read a little of it.
Q. Interpreting	T	What do you think is going to happen from the title?
Making Inferences	P1	I think he's a hockey player and he did something wrong and they won't let him play hockey.
Q. Evaluating	T	Why do you think that?
Evaluating	P1	Because of the picture. They're playing hockey and he's going off.
Statement* Interpreting	P	Well, he had bad luck and he's not a very good scorer and nobody likes him so he doesn't play.
Q. Evaluating	T	Why do you think that?
Evaluating	P1	Well, because nobody likes him.
Q. Evaluating	T	Why do you think nobody likes him?
Evaluating	P1	'Cause he doesn't make good scores.
		(Children read silently)
Q. Interpreting	T	What do you suppose is going to happen next, without reading on?
Theorizing Hypothesizing	P1	He might be able to get on the team and he'll be skating real good and his friend will be jealous because he can skate so good. He was a real good skater and now he's doing a better job.
Q. Evaluating	T	Why do you think this is going to happen?
Evaluating	P1	'Cuz, it said that he was a good skater and good skier.
		(Children read silently)
Q. Interpreting	T	What do you think is going to happen now?
Statement	T	It said the reason that Bozo was always getting in trouble.
Theorizing Hypothesizing	P1	They might let him on the team and he might

		get like he's going to shoot the puck and somebody might fall down and he would hit him accidently and they'll think that he did it on purpose.
Q. Evaluating	T	Why do you think this?
Interpreting	P1	It just came to me.
Theorizing Evaluating	P2	He might get into a fight because he's playing, because hockey's a rough sport.
Theorizing Hypothesizing	P3	Maybe he's going to get a real good goal/ and maybe the boys he doesn't like push him and he makes a bad one.

*Pupil initiated statement.

The DR–TA questioning strategy may be used with non-fiction as well as fiction. As teachers continue to become more deeply involved with the use of inquiry approaches in science, concept teaching in social studies, and problem-solving techniques in modern math, the use of a DR–TA appraoch with reading materials will provide consistency among teaching techniques.

The pre-teaching of "new" words is not advocated in this teaching strategy. When a pupil comes to a word he doesn't recognize, the following procedure is suggested:

1. Skip the word.
2. Read to the end of the sentence.
3. Go back to the word and see if you can figure it out (this gives the pupil an opportunity to pull together the elements within a word recognition system – context, phonics, structural analysis, sight words).
4. If you can figure out the word, go right on reading.
5. If you still don't know the word, ask your teacher and she will tell you what it is.

While the pupils read, the teacher notes individual pupil's difficulties and strengths. After the reading, she will plan skill-building activities with each pupil in the group. This is a cooperative-planning time: one which allows the pupil to share responsibilities for his own learning. This type of planning allows for individual differences; activities may be planned for a pupil to work independently, or a small subgroup may be established for instruction in a specific skill needed by several pupils. Skill building activities which are planned in this fashion allow the teacher to make the most efficient use of her time as well as her pupils.

When children are assigned to groups for instruction to develop reading-thinking skills, it

is crucial that teachers utilize such instruments as informal reading inventories to make certain that the reading materials will be at each child's instructional level according to Betts' criteria. Children should already be achieving success as they receive instruction. It is completely erroneous to assume that children aren't being challenged if they don't have to struggle with their work. Children must not be at frustration levels when they are receiving instruction.

INDEPENDENT READING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LIBRARY

Children should be encouraged to read independently every day. As mentioned previously, it is important for children to be able to immediately transfer skills and knowledge gained through the dictation of a story or group instruction in a basal by having materials to read independently in the classroom. The following minimal materials should be readily available in the classroom:

1. Library books – fiction and non-fiction
2. Magazines
3. Newspapers
4. Television guides and telephone books containing the "yellow pages"
5. Books which individual pupils have "published"
6. Classroom books of all types

Some teachers have set aside a specific time on a daily basis during which everyone in the classroom (including teachers) reads.

Teachers who are using "plan sheets" with the children, in order to help them organize their work as well as providing them with alternatives, find that having "reading time" listed as the number one priority on the plan sheet works well.

The importance of a good library seems obvious. The library should serve as the major resource center or learning center of the entire school. The place of media in our society today makes it essential for children to learn that books are not the only source of information, that the whole realm of media opens up a new world of information to us.

Teachers might begin asking children at early ages, "What do you want to learn?" not just "What do you want to read?" The library functioning as a learning center should provide children access to films, filmstrips, records, reference materials, etc. Close cooperation needs to be established between the classroom teacher and the librarian as they work together to provide children with the means to discover.

"Children cannot create out of vacuum. They must have something to say and be fired to say it."

– Natalie Cole
The Arts in the Classroom

17

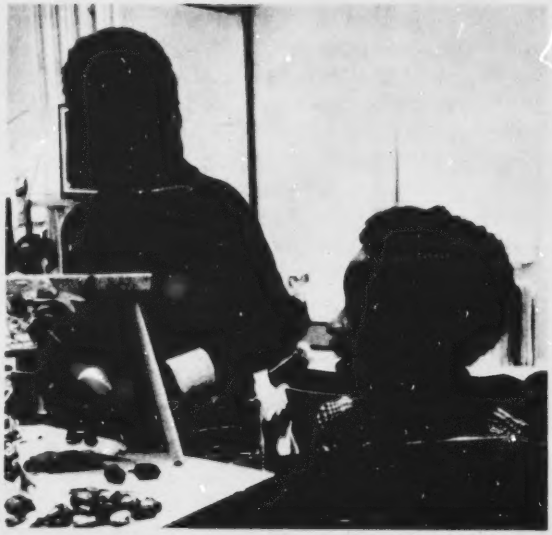
Maria

CHAPTER III
THE CLASSROOM AS A LEARNING LABORATORY

The Language-Experience Approach with its multi-method and its focus on the pupil and his experiences can be enhanced within a classroom which serves as a learning laboratory for children. No longer are desks and chairs kept in neat little rows, but instead, are grouped so that children can interact with one another and children's language can flow. A classroom should be a center for discussions, sharing, discovering, learning and thinking. For this to take place, there must be a structure to it all so that children may learn responsibility for themselves and others.

Most teachers have the ability and are capable of establishing some type of structure within a classroom that enables children to move freely within the room, work individually, and work with other children.

Some teachers find it works best for their children and themselves to establish interest areas one at a time within their classrooms. Children learn the purpose for the interest area, and how to use its accompanying materials before the next area is established. For example, one teacher set up an art activity area which contained the following: an easel (two-sided), brushes, paint and water, and a small open-shelved cabinet which contained many kinds of paper, crayons, and scissors. Since there was only room for two children to paint at a time, she taped a "sign-up" sheet next to the easel so that children who were



interested in painting that day could write their names in the spaces provided and knew what pairs of children would be painting first, etc. Next, she taught all the children how to take care of the area, the necessity for keeping brushes clean and materials put away. Then, she observed and assisted these children for the first week the art interest area was "in business." When she felt that the children were comfortable handling the area, she established the next one. Through her planning, she felt her classroom environment and her children were secure and stable.

Another teacher felt her pupils were "secure" in the ways in which their teaching-learning environment functioned and

accurately judged them to be generally flexible and adaptable to new situations. At the beginning of the school year, she waited until she felt that she had established a good working relationship with her pupils and, after preparing them for a change, set up all her interest areas over a week-end. She, too, used plan sheets and sign-up sheets with her pupils until they could become "self-regulative" in behavior.

The following activities are suggestions for interest areas in a classroom which functions as a learning laboratory:

1. A reading area (a piece of carpeting, an "inflatable" cushion, lots of books placed informally will enhance this area and be inviting to children).
2. A book-making area (see appendix for suggestions. This area should have all the materials needed for a young author to "publish" his book – even the "Great American Novel.")
3. A science area (animals, fish, birds, plants which are growing – plus a sheet for recording observations by a child and a place for him to sign his name and place the date; experiments to perform – again, a sheet for recording observations, etc.)
4. A social studies area (games, books, filmstrips, etc., pertaining to the concepts being taught)
5. A writing area (story starters, suggestions for books, spelling handbooks, a couple of old "English books" for reference, picture dictionaries, dictionaries, lined paper – all musts for writing)
6. A problem-solving area (chess, checkers, jigsaw puzzles, simulation games, a couple of "who-dun-its" – all belong in this area)
7. An art area (one of the most important areas – children must find release through expression in art: to discover, invent, to create – without feeling as if they must excel on a competitive basis)
8. A "junk" area (a table with scraps – for pupils to do with what they will – completely unstructured – teachers clean out their garages and their attics for materials for this area)

9. A listening area (pupils can "plug in" to listening posts and listen to tapes, to other children, etc. Have you ever heard Alfred Hitchcock's recording of Ghost Stories?)

In summation, an environment which is conducive to the teaching-learning process is one in which the physical environment is warm and inviting to the teacher and her pupils. "Happy" colors are everywhere, there are things to do which are inviting and interesting to children, and those areas which are there are ones in which pupils can become actively involved. Their work is almost plastered on the walls. This is a classroom which is appropriate for a language-experience multi-method approach to learning.

Space isn't a limitation. Most teachers can fit some of these activities on a two foot shelf. If they really believe in the concept of interest areas, somehow, someway, they find an appropriate space – even in a self-contained classroom with thirty pupils.

"To construct and to create are quite different. A thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed, but a thing created is loved before it exists."

– Gilbert Keith Chesterton

". . . The first thing to do was to make a grand survey of the country she was going to travel through. 'It's something very like learning geography,' thought Alice . . ."

– Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 176

CHAPTER IV
ORGANIZATION FOR LEARNING

A structure or framework to the learning environment is crucial if children are to become more responsible for their own learning. Children need to have many alternatives and options available to them from which they can make choices. They need to know what will be expected from them; they need to have guidance from teachers to help in establishing realistic goals.

One way of assisting children to organize their activites and help them with the task of setting goals is through the use of plan sheets or goal sheets and planning periods. Many teachers find it helpful to set up some long-term activities as well as shorter ones which "tie in" with content units which are being studied. Interest areas which have been developed provide numerous activities. Other activities need to be carefully weighed in terms of teacher preparation time.

For example, a teacher might choose to have paper-mache models included as one of the long-term activities. The teacher-preparation time required each day for setting up the work area, mixing wheat paste, etc., is extensive. When the teacher maps out other activities, she will undoubtedly plan those which will not require as much preparation time as the paper-mache activity will require.

In a planning period in the morning, each child fills out a plan sheet indicating the activities he has chosen to do. A half-sheet of paper is usually sufficient for a plan sheet. A typical model would have spaces for choices to be listed and accompanying spaces for an evaluation of work accomplished. A plan sheet actually provides a record for a child containing "What I intend to do" and "What and how I did." Many children like to examine these sheets at the end of the week and look at the progress they've made. The same use should be made of them at the end of every day, so that pupils go home with accomplishments firmly in mind.

After the planning period is completed, some children may meet for group instruction in reading-thinking skills with their teacher while others begin with activities listed on their plan sheets. There is purpose and structure to this kind of movement in a classroom. Children are operating independently or in small groups; the planning period has helped them become task-oriented. The "tone" of the classroom is one of positiveness and constructiveness. The large time blocks allow for flexibility in planning and working. There is time for children to dictate stories, to participate in small group instruction, to read independently, and to become involved in a variety of learning activities.

The overall program has three strong inter-related strands which emerge — a Language Experience Approach involving group experience charts and individual dictation, group instruction with the use of content-oriented basal readers, and independent reading. Each complements the strengths and compensates for any weaknesses of the other approaches. Each approach can be

adapted to the age and the sophistication of the learner. Finally, the use of these multi-method approaches allows for complete integration of all the components of the language arts.

"The goal in education is not to increase the amount of knowledge, but to create the possibilities for a child to invent and discover. When we teach too fast, we keep the child from inventing and discovering for himself."

– Piaget

CHAPTER V
LATER ELEMENTARY

When children reach later elementary grades, the multi-method program has progressed to a slightly different format. The Language Experience Approach is used in two distinct ways. Those children who can write and have become more fluent in reading may no longer be involved in dictating; they may be simply writing every day about their own experiences and experiences that are taking place in the classroom. Those children who are not as fluent may still be involved in the dictating process on a required basis.

One teacher, Mrs. M., has a mirror set up in her classroom. She also has a large collection of hats. Mrs. M. has her children put on the hats to see themselves as different persons when they look in the mirror. They have opportunities to talk about how they look and how they feel. Then some children dictate their thoughts, while others independently write their thoughts. The following story shows how one youngster reacts to hats:

I hate hats Some folks likes to wear hats but I don't. Hats give me the creaps. Hats make my head swet. Hats make me swet to death. I might even faint in that old hat.

– David Allen, 5th Grade, Martin Luther King Elem. Rockford, IL

Another teacher had her children hollow out pumpkins at Halloween time. The following story resulted:

WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH A PUMPKIN

You can cut a hole in the top and hollow it out and then put water in it and when you want the water, tip it upside down. You can make a pumpkin out of it with ears. They feel bumpy. I can hold it with one hand so it isn't heavy. You can take and cook stuff out of it. Cut a hole in the top

of it so it won't burn the top. It looks like a big seed. It feels hard. It is orange. It is plump and it is fat. It is yellow on the inside. We are going to make a pie out of it.

– Steven, Welsh Elementary School, Rockford, IL

All children are involved in independent reading. Group skills instruction is provided through the use of basals and non-fiction materials, including those used in content areas. More and more emphasis is placed on learning and the learning process, in order to help children understand that reading isn't the only way to learn.

The range of children's abilities increases as their experiences broaden and increase. In these grades, as well as in the primary grades, the teacher must provide skills instruction to fit the needs of each child. The planning and organization needed to provide the overall structure of the classroom and provide for individual and small group instruction in skills is a major task.

"Inquiries made among mature readers revealed two very illuminating facts. They indicated, first, that the crucial point in the development of permanent reading interests was when reading began to inspire, to bring convictions, to make changes in the reader's core of values, and to open up new vistas.

"The second is the very great influence of a teacher who is a lover of good books and who has the capacity to open up to children and youth the appreciations and other rewards inherent in reading."

– William S. Gray, *Providing Reading Materials Appropriate to Interest and Maturity Levels*

CHAPTER VI
MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

Modifications of the Language Experience Approach can be used very effectively at the middle school and high school levels. The multi-method approach and its format can fit naturally into a developmental reading program. Content area teachers will find many uses for language-experience as they assist pupils in learning the specific concepts in their areas of specialization. An important use of the Language Experience Approach is with pupils who are having difficulties in reading. These youngsters are developing mature tastes and interests and, many times, balk at the mere thought of having to read "baby books." Youngsters' interests and experiences can serve as springboards for dictation at these levels. The teacher records a youngster's language using the same procedures suggested for working with beginning readers. Older pupils, too, feel pride in becoming authors and feelings of positive self-concept are enhanced. The heightened feelings of self-worth were beautifully described by a fifteen-year-old after he had completed his first dictating session. He commented to his teacher, "It's the first time anyone ever thought anything I said was important enough to write down!"

"Great progress has been made in developing helpful techniques and materials for teaching reading, but no packaged process will ever meet the wide variety of personalities faced by teachers in classrooms and looked after by parents at home. This is especially true if we approach children with a respect for their eagerness to learn and if we honor the integrity of their taste. Then, instead of teaching young people as if we were feeding them packaged prescriptions, we inspire them and challenge them to invest their efforts and ideas in learning to read."

– Roma Gans, *Common Sense in Teaching of Reading*

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CHAPTER VII
ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

The Language Experience Approach, with its emphasis on the language fluency and experiences of the learner, has advantages when used as an instructional approach with adult literacy programs. Teachers working with adults must design programs which fit the needs of each adult. Although there are some commercially prepared reading materials designed for use with adults, an adult learner maintains a higher degree of motivation toward materials which reflect his own needs and interests. The word bank concept can be utilized in building a sight vocabulary of words frequently used by the adult learner.

Many adults have feelings of distrust and fears of failure about learning how to read. The responsibility and feelings of success and achievement, created by dictating their own reading materials based on their experiences, help overcome the feelings of fear and distrust. Some adults have found immense satisfaction in dictating and writing in poetry forms.

"Perhaps the single most important thing about a book for children is that it is an experience. The child has gained something and grown a little."

— Russell G. Stauffer, *Directing Reading Maturity As A Cognitive Process*

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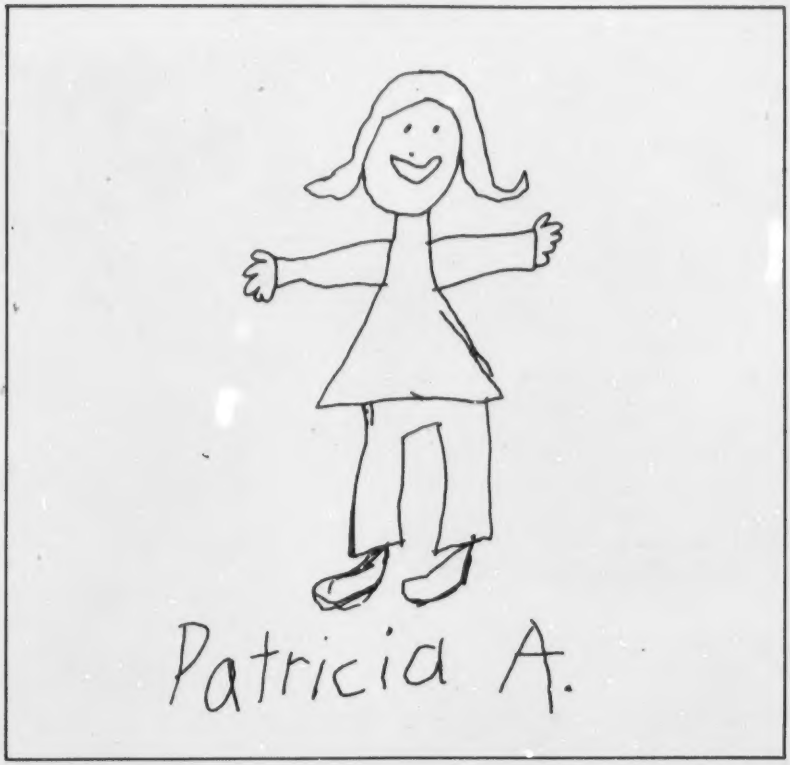

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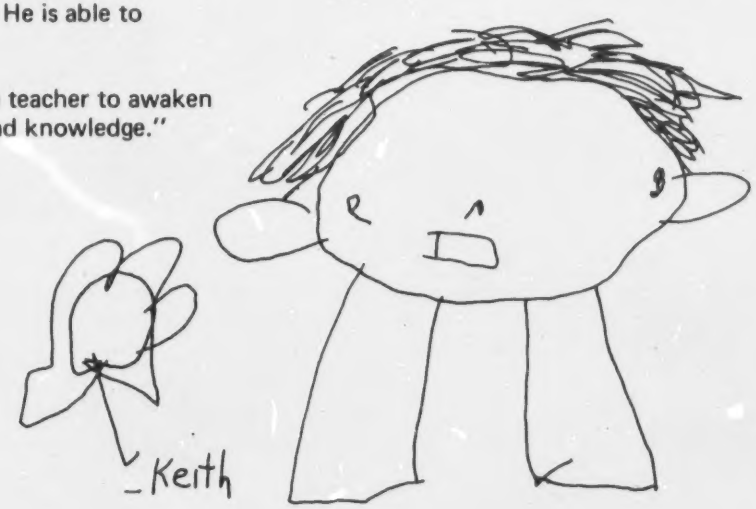
CHAPTER VIII
BILINGUALS

There has been increased emphasis on establishing programs for children who are bilingual, and many teachers are finding use of the Language Experience Approach an advantage in providing instruction for these children in their classrooms. As bilingual children develop fluency in our language, they begin dictating or writing stories and poems. If difficulty is encountered when a child can't think of an appropriate word in our language, he simply uses the appropriate term in his natural language. This provides the teacher with immediate feedback on difficult words encountered by the pupil, and the pupil doesn't feel thwarted. He is able to succeed.

"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge."

– Albert Einstein



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CHAPTER IX
ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

It just isn't possible in this type of publication to describe in depth the language-experience multi-method approach and all its ramifications for instruction. An attempt has been made, however, to present an overview of the Language Experience Approach and provide suggestions for implementation and practical application at all levels of instruction.

Those persons who are interested in increasing their knowledge of the Language Experience Approach are urged to read and study research and writing in this field written by Dr. Russell G. Stauffer, and in particular, his marvelous text, *The Language Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading,* published by Harper and Row, 1970. Other appropriate materials are listed in the bibliography.

Gene

Michelle

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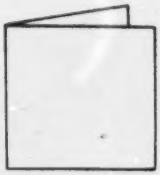
APPENDIX

MAKING BOOKLETS WITH DRYMOUNT

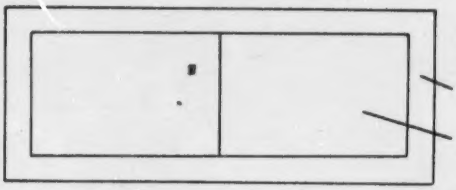


(A)

1. Fold Paper in half for pages. Diagram A.

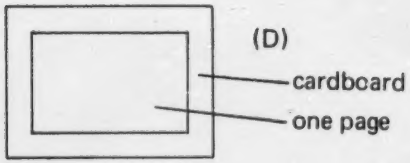
(B)

2. Sew along dotted lines with needle and thread (some teachers are massproducing all sizes and shapes using their sewing machines to sew pages). Diagram B.



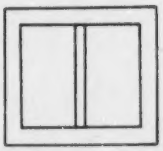
(C)

3. Cut cloth or wallpaper one inch larger than book pages (lay open and flat to measure). Diagram C.



(D)

4. Cut two pieces of cardboard (shirt cardboard works well) a little larger than pages. Diagram D.



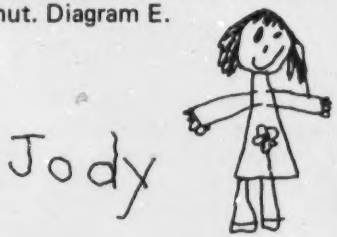
(E)

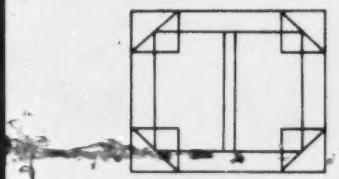
cloth

drymount under cardboard

5. A piece of drymount is cut to fit between the cardboard and the cloth. Diagram E.

6. Lay cloth flat, place drymount on top, then carboard pieces. Leave space between cardboard pieces to allow book to open and shut. Diagram E.

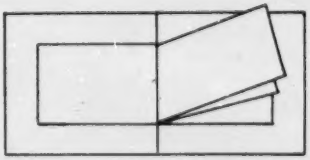




(F)

7. With iron, press a few places to hold cardboard in place. Diagram F.

8. Fold corners in; then fold top down and iron; then fold bottom up and iron. Diagram F.

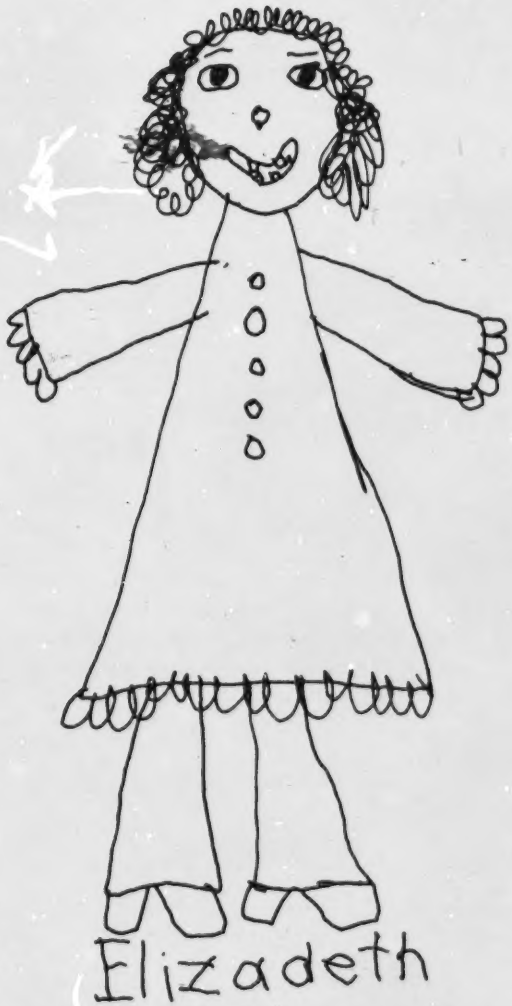


(G)

first page

last page

9. Cut second piece of drymount the same size as open pages. Lay drymount on open cover; lay open pages on drymount; press first page, then last page to the cover. Diagram G.



CAUTION: NEVER PLACE IRON DIRECTLY ON DRY MOUNT OR IT WILL STICK TIGHT

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